

Public Works Committee
Tuesday, March 2, 2010
1st floor meeting room, Town Hall

present: Steve Braun, Michael Cann, Don George, Charlie Moran, Vince O'Connor, Rob Crowner, Guilford Mooring

1. Administrative matters:

- a. The meeting is called to order at 7:02pm.
- b. Minutes of the January 26, 2010 meeting are approved by a vote of 5-0 with one abstention.
- c. The next meeting is set for Tuesday, April 6, 2010.

2. Updates:

a. Sidewalk plowing recommendation: Charlie reports that the Select Board accepted the committee's recommendation on expanded sidewalk plowing at its meeting on March 1. The remainder of the winter season will be a trial run for possible implementation next year. Guilford describes some of the issues that have come up so far: uncertain amount of funds remaining in the budget, additional work for DPW staff, the need to bring a spare (and aging) machine back into service, and overgrown brush next to some sidewalks that makes plowing difficult.

b. Street lighting: Guilford reports that the DPW is in the process of identifying which streetlights would be turned off if an override vote fails. Existing town policy, established by the Select Board, calls for streetlights at intersections, the ends of cul-de-sacs, and on sharp curves [N.B.: after the meeting it was determined that the policy also extends to streets with heavy pedestrian traffic]. The lights that will be cut will be those that are not covered under these provisions. Some sidewalks would become dark, potentially making walking at night more dangerous. The cuts would save an estimated \$50,000 in energy costs, though there would be some cost to disconnect the lights - particularly if the power company insists on doing that itself rather than allowing DPW staff to do it. Some lights in the downtown area will be set to turn off automatically late at night, but this is not possible everywhere.

Vince moves to recommend that the Select Board revise the streetlight policy by making lights in the following areas essential:

- places of heavy pedestrian traffic (irrespective of vehicle traffic) not otherwise lit (e.g., East Hadley Road and North Pleasant Street north of UMass)
- places of significant pedestrian traffic where there are no sidewalks (e.g., East Pleasant Street north of Village Park)
- bus stops not otherwise lit

Guilford states that the streetlight expense is part of the DPW budget, which must absorb \$200,000 in cuts in the next fiscal year. If streetlights are kept on, something else - likely personnel - would have to be cut instead. Furthermore, an in-the-works project will mandate the addition of new lights not currently in the town's inventory. Charlie suggests transmitting a statement to the Select Board that describes the choice between safety and staffing and the committee's dismay with cutting either. Vince states that his motion would not necessarily require restoration of the full \$50,000 and requests that an analysis be made to determine how much of an impact there would be. The Select Board should find the savings elsewhere in the town budget. Michael states that a debate about streetlights has happened before and in the end not as much changed as was feared. He believes it is too late to change policy going into an override vote, and that it can't be known whether such a change would help or hurt the chances of an override anyway.

Vince agrees to defer consideration of his motion until the next meeting, when more information about the impact of the cuts will be available and instead offers an alternate motion authorizing the committee chair to write a letter to the newspaper on behalf of the committee, describing the streetlight policy and the implications of turning lights off. The committee approves the motion by a vote of 5-1.

c. Staffing cuts: Vince requests that the committee make a statement about the funding level of the DPW budget in comparison to the availability of vehicle excise tax funds. He believes that most people perceive a correlation between excise tax receipts and automobile infrastructure investment, yet tax support for the DPW budget is already less than receipts from the excise tax and the proposed cuts will make the disparity even greater. Don points out that the excise is actually on personal property - autos being the most significant for most people - and that the receipts go into the town's general fund; the tax is not intended to be a dedicated source of funds for any particular governmental function. Vince suggests making a political argument rather than a legal one: People expect that the roads on which they drive their taxable cars will be taken care of.

d. Capital plan: Charlie reports that the road repair "catch-up" package is currently on the JCPC list, but in danger of being dropped if the override fails. Guilford states that it would consist of two large bond issues: \$2.5 million for ten years and \$2 million for five years.

e. Sand Hill Road: Guilford reports no progress. Vince states that Sand Hill Road should just be ground up if it's not going to be paved.

3. New business:

a. Rambling Road: Guilford states that there are no plans to use either Rambling Road or Hampshire College as detours during the Atkins Corner project. If traffic does incidentally rise as reported by neighbors, then barriers will be installed to discourage it.

b. Route 116: Guilford states that the stimulus-funded Route 116 resurfacing project is set to begin next week. It will extend from just south of Snell Street to just north of the Hampshire College driveway, except for Pomeroy Village between the two bridges. The state will be holding a public hearing for the Notch section of the Route 116 project in the near future. The state is also interested in repairing the entirety of Route 9, so additional stimulus money may be directed to Amherst at some point.

5. The meeting is adjourned at 8:24pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner